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ABSTRACT

This report examines how parent involvement in running day care centers in France has increased in recent years, and investigates the role that the Association des Collectifs Enfants Parents Professionnels (ACEPP) has played in making this form of child care more acceptable. After a discussion of the historical development and current choices of child care provisions in France, the concept of parent-run day care centers is described. Information is presented about the establishment and operation of parent-run centers, as well as issues and problems associated with this form of child care. The role of ACEPP in promoting development, encouraging dialogue, providing training, and working in the poorest areas of France is discussed, and applications of the model to disadvantaged and migrant families are described. A description is provided of the ACEPP-Bernard van Leer Foundation Project, a 3-year experimental project which examines factors limiting educational attainment among young disadvantaged migrants. The report closes with a discussion of overall issues and conclusions drawn from the study. Brief descriptions of three parent-run day care centers in Paris are attached. (MM)

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Parent run day care centres: the growth of a French community initiative

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Editorial history

This paper has been specially prepared for the Bernard van Leer Foundation, and represents the first full statement in English of French community day care centres. A French version has been used as source material by Jean Louis Laville in his book, *Les services de proximité en Europe* (Neighbourhood Services in Europe), published by Syros Alternatives, 1992.

ACEPP itself has published a number of documents, in French, on aspects of community crèches. These are available from its office at 15 rue du Charolais, 75012 Paris, France.

Lisa Harker's observations were also written for the Foundation, but a fuller report to the Peter Kirk Memorial Fund, called *Nursery Lessons: what can be learnt from day care provision for the under threes in France and Germany?* is available from the Fund.

About the author

Since 1986 Josette Combes has been one of the key influences in developing the Association des Collectifs Enfants Parents Professionels (ACEPP), a French non-governmental umbrella organisation based in Paris, which provides technical support, advice, training and advocacy for parents and professionals wishing to set up community day care centres.

Trained as a socio-linguist with experience of working with adolescents and adults, she has had particular responsibility within ACEPP for developing parent controlled centres in disadvantaged areas. As such, she is also coordinator of the Bernard van Leer supported project, based within ACEPP to develop such centres in multicultural communities.

Apart from her work with ACEPP Josette Combes has 'expert' status within the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in connection with the Organisation's current programme on *Children at Risk*.

Lisa Harker won a Peter Kirk Memorial Fund scholarship in the UK in 1991 to study day care provision for under threes in France and Germany. She spent six months in both countries, during which she visited a number of community day care centres in Paris. She is currently a development officer with the Day Care Trust in London.

About the project

The *Association des Collectifs Enfants Parents Professionnels* (ACEPP – the Association of Collectives of Children, Parents and Professionals) was created in 1981 to support, and advocate for, parental involvement in day care centres. Since then, it has seen its membership grow to some 850 centres which are run and controlled by parents and local communities.

In 1986 ACEPP, supported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation, began a project to take the idea of such community day care centres to four disadvantaged areas of France. These areas have high concentrations of multicultural communities. The question was whether the idea of such centres could be adapted to serve the needs of these communities.

From the original four sites, there are today some 25 centres which are operating in multicultural communities and ACEPP, on the basis of its experience, has trained 45 professionals to work in such communities.

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GLOSSARY

Arrondissement	area of Paris
Baccalaureat	secondary school leaving diploma
Conseils Generaux	district authorities
Crèche Parentales	parent run crèche
Direction Departementale de la Jeunesse et des Sports	Ministry of Youth and Sport
Fondation de France	Foundation of France
Fonds National d'Aide	National Aid Fund
Ministère de l'Education Nationale	Ministry of National Education (at present the Ministry is called the *Ministère de l'Education Nationale*)
Ministère des Affaires Sociales et de l'Intégration	Ministry of Social Affairs

ABBREVIATIONS

ACEPP *Association des Collectifs Enfants, Parents, Professionnels*
Association of Children, Parents and Professionals

CAF *Caisse d'Allocations Familiales*
Family Allocation Fund, regional branches of the *Caisse Nationale d'Allocations Familiales*, see below

CNAF *Caisse Nationale d'Allocations Familiales*
National Family Allocation Fund

DDASS *Direction Departementale des Affaires Sanitaires et Sociales*
Department of Health and Social Affairs

FAS *Fonds d'Action Sociale pour les Travailleurs Migrants et leurs Familles*
Fund for Social Action for Migrant Workers and their Families

HLM *Habitation a Loyer Modere*
Low Rent Accommodation Agency

PMI *Protection Maternelle et Infantile*
Mothers and Children's Protection Agency

Parent run day care centres: the growth of a French community initiative

Introduction

The place of the child has been a key to the evolution of our societies in the latter half of the twentieth century. Among the many factors that have brought about development and change – medical and scientific advances, improvements in living standards and education, altered perceptions of the role of women – it is now recognised that the first few years of life are of utmost importance for the future development of the individual. But current economic and social theories still lack a coherent and integrated policy approach to the first years of a child's life, an approach which takes into account the needs of the child and the needs of the parents.

Supporting children in their first years of life, and encouraging parents to be involved in the development of their children, have been guiding principles for ACEPP since its inception in 1981. This paper looks at how parent involvement in running day care centres has increased in recent years, and the role that ACEPP has played in making this form of child care more acceptable.

The historical development of child care provisions in France

The main original concern in the field of child development was for children's survival. But as success on this front – measured by decreasing infant mortality rates – was achieved, the inculcation of high moral standards became the priority.

Women have always worked, and the traditional nature of the tasks they performed initially meant that they could bring their children to be with them at their work place, or, if necessary, another member of their family would help. Industrialisation brought many changes which affected not just the workplace, but also housing and living patterns, and created new aspirations among parents for their children's education. Industrialisation ended both the possibility of women caring for their children on their own, and the perceived desirability of child care by such family members as grandparents.

Thus the question of day care first arose in France when women were drawn *en masse* into the workforce by the demands of the Industrial Revolution in the first half of the 19th century. Children of the many women who could not afford wet nurses were simply brought along by their mothers to the factories where they did small chores as soon as they were able. In 1841 the government passed a law prohibiting child labour, and subsequently a system of charitable crèches was set up for the children of 'honest' working mothers. Most women, however, still preferred to leave their children with childminders, who were also subject to

inspection. Eventually the crèches were integrated into the public system, and have become the nursery schools of today.

In the early part of the 20th century many laws concerning child protection were passed, and the period saw considerable expansion and development of pre-school and crèche provision. A government agency, *La Protection Maternelle et Infantile* (PMI) was instituted in 1945, and a 1947 decree created a state diploma in infant care.

The current choices

About 50 per cent of the female population in France today is employed. This includes the mothers of approximately 1,800,000 children under six years of age. Tables 1 and 2 provide further details.

Table 1: Percentage of mothers at work*

Family composition	Percentage of mothers at work
1 child under 3 years	72
1 child over 3 years	76
3 children, 1 under 3	27

About 25 per cent of all working women work part-time (less than 30 hours a week). Most working women are poorly qualified. There is a statutory right to paid parental leave and continued employment which is open to both parents but used almost exclusively by women. Twice as many women are unemployed as men, women being more vulnerable to recession.

Table 2: Status of working women*

Type of employment	Percentage of working women
Domestic service	9.3
Factory/shopwork	59.0
Technicians/middle managers	14.0
Teachers	10.0
Engineers/top managers	2.0
Unknown	5.7

Over 10 per cent of all families are one parent families, and most of these single parents are women.

Table 3: Child care arrangements*

Type of provision	Percentage
Stay with mother	59
Nursery school (from 2 years)	11
Left with family	11
Childminder	8
State run crèche (90,900 places in 1987)	3
Family day care centres	2
Other day care	6

* These figures date from 1982, when the last family survey was carried out.

Different countries in Europe have tackled the issue of child care provision in different ways. In France a new network of care for children outside the home has been developed. For children under the age of three, there are various day care options. These are:

- State run crèches:
  supervised by the *Direction Departementale des Affaires Sanitaires et Sociales* (DDASS), include municipal crèches (80 per cent) under the wing of local authorities; regional crèches (17 per cent) run by DDASS itself; and establishments run by large non-governmental organisations like the Red Cross. There are also private crèches, founded by associations and clubs. The parent run day care centres described later in the paper come into this category. Some large firms and hospitals also provide crèches for the children of staff.

- Family day care centres:
  also supervised by DDASS, were started in 1959 to provide bases for registered child-minders and relieve them of financial dependency on parents. These crèches are supervised by doctors or specialists in infant welfare and the majority of them (81 per cent) are run by local authorities or community centres.

- Part-time day care centres:
  again supervised by DDASS, were originally intended as temporary provision for children whose mothers do not work. However, in recent years they have become flexible and now accept children on a full-time basis whose mothers only work part-time.

- Registered maternal assistants (childminders):
  can look after one or more children at home, once they have been recognised by the DDASS. In 1977 the role of childminder was acknowledged by law. Childminders are still the most popular solution to child care needs for most families, and are the most readily available. However, at least half the childminders are not registered and not subject to supervision, although figures are not, of course, available.

For children over three years of age, provision is much more extensive:

- Nursery schools:
  supervised by the French Ministry of National Education, are free. They take children aged from 3 to 6 years, in classes of about 25, though in recent years two year olds have been admitted as well. The schools' objective is to 'contribute to the development of the personality of the child in all its aspects, physical, intellectual and emotional'. One third of all children in the 2 to 3 year age group now attend these schools, and over 95 per cent of all children in the 4 to 6 age range. The most interesting developments in the field of pedagogical research in recent years have come from the nursery schools.

- Vacation day care centres:
  are supervised by the *Direction Departementale de la Jeunesse et des Sports* and accept children of school age during school vacations and often before and after school. Each centre has a qualified director and is run by the local authority. Families make a financial contribution.

Training

A variety of training is available for staff who work in child care. The emphasis of the training has moved beyond its original focus on health alone, to include aspects of the child's cognitive and psychomotor needs. But inequality in the

status of people working in the different forms of child care remains a problem: there is a need to harmonise working practices and job opportunities. There is also work to be done on further developing family involvement and schemes for continuing education. In France, as elsewhere, work with children is undervalued, seldom carried out by men, and grossly underpaid.

Funding

The central institution which links the various child care options in France is the *Caisse Nationale d'Allocations Familiales* (CNAF) and its regional branches, known as CAF. They finance both public and private sector child care, and are responsible for drawing up and implementing policies to promote the creation of child care centres and to coordinate their work. They contribute either directly to schemes, or indirectly through providing various forms of financial help to families.

Funding mechanisms are:

- Service Benefit:
  started in 1970, is a subsidy to day care centres to fund operating costs, calculated per diem against the number of children attending, and corresponding to roughly one third of total costs. It amounts at present to Ffr. 55.25 (approximately US$ 11) per day per child in state run crèches; Ffr. 50.17 (approximately US$ 10) in family day care centres, Ffr. 38.28 (approximately US$ 7.6) in parent run day care centres and Ffr. 15.51 (approximately US$ 5.50) in part-time centres and vacation day care centres. These payments are granted on the condition that at least one of the parents is covered by Social Security Insurance.

- Special Childminder's Benefit:
  is awarded to families who place their child with a qualified childminder, and is intended to discourage the use of unregistered minders. But it is not often claimed, as so many minders are not registered.

- Day Care Centre Contracts:
  begun in 1983, are intended to encourage municipal authorities to establish day care centres by giving a grant of up to 50 per cent of the total costs of a centre for 0 to 3 year olds. The 18,820 places created so far are modest compared with the original objective, but the number of children attending day care centres has increased by 68 per cent in the municipalities which have benefited from these contracts.

- Childhood Contracts:
  began in 1988 to encourage the establishment of day care centres and an overall increase in municipal spending on care for 0 to 6 year olds. They include the expenses of setting up centres, training of staff and coordinating services and are a means of promoting coordinated child care policies in local communities.

The regional CAFs have established a scale of fees for child care which determines the family financial contribution based on income. This system, though apparently fair, tends to penalise those day care centres which do not receive any support from municipal authorities – parent run centres, for example.

Apart from CAF, the main sources of finance for child care are the municipalities and the *Conseils Généraux*, the district authorities. *Fonds National d'Aide* (National Aid Fund) was set up in 1985 by the Ministry of Social Affairs to assist the creation of parent run day care centres. The Ministry allocates a lump sum of between Ffr. 15,000 (approximately US$ 3,000) and Ffr. 30,000

(approximately US$ 6,000) as start-up funding for the centres, so that they need spend less time waiting for subsidies from other sources. The DDASS may lay down conditions for the initial budgeting of this money.

In rural areas a major barrier to the development of day care provision is the affiliation of the agricultural professions to a system of social insurance which does not offer the same level of subsidy as the CAF. This explains the relative lack of provision in these areas, and is a serious handicap for those centres which do exist.

Nursery schools are financed both by the Ministry of National Education, which pays for teaching staff and educational equipment, and by the municipalities, which pay for the upkeep of the buildings and the salaries of maintenance staff.

Recent changes in the social context

Since the second world war, there have been a number of changes in the role and status of women in French society. Women from the middle and upper classes became more prominent in the labour market. More rewarding careers, and new avenues of independence and freedom became open to women: but these avenues were soon seen as illusory for many. The labour market tends to exclude those who are not flexible and versatile: women who leave it for a few years find it difficult to return. In addition jobs change rapidly in their number and nature, thus making security of tenure precarious, progression uncertain, and regular retraining necessary.

At the same time, family structures became precarious and unstable, too. More women found themselves on their own, through divorce, or being widowed or left alone.

Cultural and technological changes altered the nature of housework and the recognition given to it. Despite the teaching profession being dominated by women, the role played by parents – and especially women – in education within the family was also given little recognition. Advances in understanding of the importance of early childhood education and of techniques in providing it actually undermined the confidence women had in themselves as important figures in their children's development.

Thus the roles played by women on many fronts were hardly recognised, and their ability to be more active in society was impeded.

By the 1970s, several key aspects of social, economic and cultural change could be identified in:

- family life: there were increasing numbers of working mothers; feminist and women's organisations were campaigning for equal rights for women; divorce was becoming easier; numbers of children were declining. A key change concerned the distribution of tasks between men and women, in particular the involvement of men in the care of young children;

- political affairs: the role of authoritarian institutions was being questioned, in that they restricted personal freedom and democracy in the broadest sense;

- pedagogy: more importance was being placed on the need for caring, stimulating and socially interactive early childhood education.

It was in response to these changes that, during the 1970s, a movement was initiated by parents to promote a form of day care provision for children in

which parental involvement (including fathers as well as mothers) was central rather than peripheral.

Child care provision is more extensive in regions which have large conurbations. Almost half the places in official crèches, more than a third of the places in family crèches, and one sixth of the places in parent run day care centres are concentrated in the Ile de France, around Paris. Where child care provision does not exist, particularly in the rural areas, private run alternatives have developed. These may have been recognised by various authorities.

How this movement came about, and what it has achieved now follows.

A new formula: parent run day care centres

In the 1970s, amid a general increase in alternative and non-official schemes, a new kind of day care service began to emerge that offered parents a chance to maintain some responsibility for early childhood education. Against the background of the changing social, cultural and economic situation, parents were trying to recover their power in the educational arena: to take it back from professionals. They wanted to create more self-managed child care and education systems, free of institutional restrictions, and to place more emphasis on child development and less on health and hygiene. Parents were concerned about the scarcity of early childhood education provision in many areas. They wanted to try to find their own solutions to their own problems; and wanted to soften the boundaries between home and day care centre. They wanted to provide a good social framework for children to relate to their peers, as a step along the way to the collective life they would face at school. They wanted a better balance between the roles played by parents and those played by professionals. They wanted to promote the parents' role in early childhood education, especially the fathers', and were concerned about the lack of control that they, as consumers, were able to exercise over the products they needed to consume.

Initially, parents who found that there were no places for their children in the state run crèches decided to join together and take on collective responsibility for the care of their children. The first parent run centres began to open in public buildings and private apartments. When possible the parents hired professional help, so that there was continuity, but took turns to work with the children themselves. Though these centres were characterised by the high level of parental involvement, they were constantly under threat because of the difficulty of finding suitable locations and permanent staff.

A series of newspaper articles on this new kind of child care attracted the interest of the educational establishment. In 1980 the Health Minister, Jacques Barrot, made a series of visits to centres in Paris, which numbered only seven at the time. Both the CNAF and the *Fondation de France*, which wanted to fund child care, began to show interest, and the *Ministère du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Formation Professionnelle* (Ministry of Labour) saw the centres as a possible source of job creation.

The centres felt the need to get together to exchange ideas and information on improving their operating conditions, and to lobby and advocate to make known both their needs and potential. They also wanted to establish some means of transferring know-how amongst themselves, and to the wider audience of childhood education professionals and institutions. Already those involved in the first few centres had begun to be called upon by the media and administrators, and by parents wanting advice on setting up new centres. These demands became impossible to reconcile with the prime concern of the day care centres – child care.

So the centres decided to collaborate in forming a representative organisation to defend their interests and provide help and information for others.

The creation of ACEPP

After twelve months of preparatory work, the representative organisation, ACEPP was officially recognised in February 1981. It performs three functions:

- it acts as a federation of centres, providing its members with technical support, training, insurance, and materials;
- it carries out lobbying and advocacy work in the field of parental and children's interests, and is successful in bringing about changes in the practices of the major child care institutions, and in the training of professional workers. ACEPP was the first parents' lobby group to advocate on behalf of children's issues;
- it builds up and disseminates information on early childhood education and parental involvement as widely as possible among educationalists and the general public.

At first, ACEPP had almost no funding and had to rely on support from volunteers from the day care centres. Negotiations with the Ministry of Social Affairs led to the publication of a circular in August 1981 which recognised the existence of parent run day care centres, granted them a legal status, and gave them access to subsidies from the CAF.

In January 1982 ACEPP organised the first meeting of representatives from 22 parent run day care centres. The event brought to the fore some of the problems parents faced in running centres, such as the use of space; daily procedures; treating illness and children with behavioural problems. They also needed help with issues such as professional permanent help; launching a centre; the role of ACEPP itself; and funding from public authorities.

The content of subsequent meetings reflected the ambivalence of the pioneers towards institutionalisation. They were concerned about losing autonomy and the difficulties of dealing with decentralised institutions which were reluctant to carry out national policies. For example, the DDASS did not accept all the conditions for qualification as a parent run day care centre, as laid down in the circular; the regional CAF were unwilling to follow the recommendations of the CNAF; the local departments of employment were not much help with job creation, despite the fact that their Minister had signed a national agreement; the elected representatives to the municipalities were often unaware of the existence of parent run day care centres and were not inclined to support private initiatives.

By and large the parent run centres were not considered a serious form of organisation and were dismissed as an alternative crèche system for families who had the financial and intellectual resources to set up and maintain them with little or no funding. In fact, the establishment's reluctance to provide proper funding has come to be seen as an inherent financial characteristic of parent run day care centres.

The establishment and operation of parent run centres

ACEPP's first priority has always been to assist parents or child care staff who want to set up day care centres, and to help them learn how to manage their centres. It provides assistance either directly or through one of its regional branches. The procedure follows a similar pattern with all projects.

The process of setting up a parent run centre

There is a series of stages for the setting up of a new parent run centre. ACEPP, or one of its regional branches, gives support at each stage.

1. Preliminaries
   When project initiators contact ACEPP they are advised to conduct a survey to identify needs and take stock of local interest in opening a centre. This involves: getting information about the number of children under three years in the area; determining whether full or part-time care is needed; finding out what other centres exist or are planned; and establishing what attitude the municipality has towards the project. The initiators will be put in contact with other potentially interested parents on ACEPP's file.

2. Founding the association
   Once the survey is complete, the initiators have their organisation declared legal by the police, and are granted official permission to commence operations. They also notify the municipality and have a PMI doctor assigned to the centre.

   Each association has an executive board (president, secretary, treasurer), and an administrative council which meet regularly and frequently during the pre-opening and early days of operation. Each association has an annual general assembly, which is often turned into a festive occasion for members and, in some cases, the local community.

3. Premises
   The essential next step is to find premises. Most failures which occur at an early stage are due to the difficulty in finding premises, especially in large cities where they are are hard to come by. Premises can be rented from private landlords, made available by subsidised housing associations, or provided free of charge by municipalities. An estimated 150 square metres is the minimum space needed for a group of 16 children. Unfortunately, many centres have less space, which forces them to reduce the numbers of children they can accept, and less than 12 children endangers the financial viability of the project.

4. Defining the pedagogy
   The group of parents and the professional staff then draw up a plan outlining the educational values and the proposed methods of operating the project. This agreed plan is the basis for everything that follows.

5. Equipment and budgets
   The premises may need work to make it suitable for children and to bring it into line with safety regulations. Often the major work is carried out by contractors, and the parents together do the finishing touches – the painting, carpentry and so on. This stage of the preparations can be very rewarding, since it obliges parents to consider the use of space and the needs of the children, and often leads them to consider the organisation of space in their own homes. Similarly, the purchase of equipment, and educational toys in particular, can encourage parents' awareness of their children's learning needs. Lack of funds can be a catalyst for the adults' imagination: parents will often design and build together a climbing frame that fits the space available.

   Equipment is entirely financed from public funds. Usually, 40 per cent of the money comes from the CAF and 60 per cent from regional and local authorities. Since 1985 the Ministry of Social Affairs has contributed Ffr. 15,000 (approximately US$ 3,000) to Ffr. 30,000 (approximately

US$ 6,000) towards the launch of each new project, financing which had previously come from the *Fondation de France*.

Ideally, one third of operational costs is covered by the CAF service benefit, one third by local authorities and one third by parents, whose fees are based on family income. When there is no financial support from the local authority, the parental contribution is increased accordingly. When the local authority makes a contribution, day care costs are less expensive for all contributing parties, than other forms of provision.

6. Certification
After the association's documentation, budget and educational programme have been examined, and the doctor from the PMI has given approval, the subsidies will be granted. Some of these, from the CAF, for example, are paid only when invoices are produced which correspond to the estimates. Associations may be forced to juggle with their finances for a while until the first subsidies arrive. At this point the group engages one or more professional staff members, if they have not already done so. The file is then passed to the president of the district council, who authorises the opening of the centre. It is officially registered, with a certificate which stipulates the numbers of children who may attend and gives the name of the leader.

How the centres operate

The daily routine in each centre is established through experience, but is constantly reviewed and adapted during meetings between parents, with or without the professional staff. The routine provides the basis for the parents and staff to make their contributions to the centre. The house rules lay down some basic principles, like opening hours, conditions of admission and emergency procedures, which serve as the 'bible' when new parents or staff join.

The children are cared for by both staff and parents. On average there are three adults for 16 children. Usually, parents work for one morning or afternoon a week; some are very active, others not so. They will be involved in a great variety of tasks, depending on what they feel competent to do and what needs to be done. Parents may, for example, play with children, feed them, change nappies, clean, fix or repair things, contact suppliers or contractors, write letters, or meet new parents and show them round. Tasks related to the administration and budgeting of the association are usually carried out by parents, but professional staff are sometimes asked to take them on.

Parents tend not to avoid the mundane tasks: many prefer to wash dishes and sweep floors because they lack confidence to undertake tasks that they perceive as 'professional', or they do not want to be seen as interfering with the professionals. The professional staff will try to encourage the parents to become more involved with working with the children.

The professional staff members are appointed not only on the basis of their skills and qualifications, but also because they are motivated to work with this kind of centre and are committed to its educational aims and to parental involvement. Their role is to supervise interaction between the adults and children at the centre, and to act as a point of reference for both parents and children. They help them find their places in the group, while respecting individual needs and maintaining group harmony. For example, the professional worker can help a mother and child adapt to the communal routine, or assist a parent who does not know how to deal with a group of children; the worker can suggest activities to stimulate the children; or start discussions on child development when it seems that the parents would benefit from these.

The parent-professional consensus

There is a delicate balance between parents and staff, which varies according to a number of factors:

- whether the centre was founded by parents, professionals or both together;
- whether the centre is in a state of transition, with a new set of parents/ professionals becoming involved in it;
- whether the parents have skills, or need training;
- whether the centre functions in isolation or has contact with persons or institutions in the outside world;
- whether parents are able to devote time to the centre or have jobs which do not allow them time off.

The structure of centres, even those which have little parental commitment, encourages social interaction and a pleasant atmosphere. A good relationship between parents and professionals is a feature of all centres, whatever the balance of the relationship.

The educational programme

It is the educational programme, planned during the setting-up process, which brings together and codifies the needs and wishes of the families involved in the centre. It acts as a point of reference in a conflict, and a stimulus to discussion and thought for new parents. The programme addresses questions about the physical and emotional needs of children and leads to debates and group decisions about appropriate answers and attitudes. A few examples of the sort of issues that groups discuss are:

- who should be present to greet the children in the mornings, a parent or a professional;
- when should children be asked to take a nap;
- when and how should children be toilet-trained;
- what activities should be introduced to increase the children's awareness of the world around them, and in what sequence;
- what should be the balance between organised activities and free play;
- which family habits can be continued at the centre, and which are inappropriate.

Questions like these are raised during meetings, and they are also individual, day-to-day concerns. Parents tell the professional how things are done at home, and the professional tells them how things are done at the centre. In this way the children grow up in a coherent environment where adults respect their individuality while stimulating their awareness and curiosity.

The benefits

In the centres there are three parties involved: the children, the parents, and the professional staff. All benefit from their own and each other's involvement.

The children at parent run day care centres benefit from the individual attention possible within a small group, and they can easily get their bearings. They are exposed at an early age to a world of different relationships, which may contrast sharply with those in their own families; but as their parents are there with them they experience this without feeling cut off. They form special relationships which may extend beyond the centre into inter-family friendships. And they learn early on to have their emotional needs met by someone other than a parent, which helps them become less vulnerable emotionally. The professional staff are stable points of reference, which helps the children to accept a changing team of parent-helpers.

At an ACEPP General Assembly in 1985, attended by parents and children, a child care worker who had never experienced a parent run centre was astonished that the 25 children playing around the centre were happy to approach any of the adults present when they wanted help.

> My son was always behind me, always clutching my skirt. Now he's starting to play alone, he's more independent, the centre makes children sharper.*

> My child couldn't stand any other child around. I couldn't pay any attention to other children; he was awfully jealous, he used to scream. Now he introduces me to his friends.

For parents the centre is, above all, a place to exchange ideas and talk about the delicate process of learning to be a parent.

> At the beginning, when they say you are supposed to help regularly, you think, 'Oh, oh, how will I cope with the extra work?' Then you wonder whether you'll be able to handle the job or work with other children when yours will be there too, asking for attention. It is difficult at first, you worry about not doing as well as the others, or paying too much or not enough attention to your own child ... Then slowly you get used to it, your child gets used to seeing you cuddle other children. Then it is very rewarding to see your own child socialising with the others, doing the same funny or silly things as the other children ... It is a good way to get your ideas straight; it's just enough, not too much, and working with professionals and other parents helps to solve problems in a very familiar atmosphere ... You don't need to go and talk to a specialist, which is always so serious or even frightening.

> They learn to cope with group rules; they understand that things they can do at home they can't do at the centre. It is a good preparation for school.

> Dimitri would never eat meat at home. I told the staff and they said they would not force him. But then they said, 'He eats meat without any fuss.' How do they do it?

Parent run centres can provide a support network which can solve domestic problems. For example, having to work longer hours than the centre is open can be solved by another family bringing the child home, or reciprocal childminding to avoid the need for expensive babysitters. For single parents the centre provides a group of sympathetic people who can help to make up for the absence of a partner.

Parent run centres create a system which makes it easier for parents to reconcile their family and working lives, and which helps to alleviate, if not eliminate, the guilt that many mothers feel on leaving their children in the care of others.

> I didn't want to leave my baby when she was so young, one of the youngest at only five months old. In the beginning I stayed in the centre most of the time, although I needed to do my shopping and other tasks. I could not really bring myself to go. After a while Michelle, the professional worker, said, 'It's all right, she feels at home, you can go.' Then I left for about an hour. I was afraid she would cry and cry, but when I came back I could see that she was playing happily. I understood then that the problem was more mine than hers.

* This quote, and all the others from parents, was abstracted from a booklet publishes by ACEPP called *La point de vue des familles* (The families' point of view). The booklet contains interviews with 40 parents from four pilot projects.

> Mothers hardly dare leave their children if they are not working. I didn't dare in the beginning. I found myself always trying to find a good excuse to leave my child. When I saw that my child liked going to the centre, I had a good excuse and could have some free time without feeling guilty.

Centres offer parents a support group based on 'structural' companionship, requiring them to engage in meetings and dialogue with others and to share responsibility in the same place and for the same resources. Children become the mediators, giving the adults a reason to get closer – and sometimes they are the unwitting cause of dissension. The chance to talk to other parents about the problems of bringing up children can help to prevent families from turning in on themselves:

> I hardly got out of the house before. Now, when I feel alone, I come to the centre for an hour or so, just to sit.

> I used to spend the whole day in my nightdress. Now I get dressed and visit the centre.

> When I moved to this neighbourhood I knew nobody. I had no family or friends around, nobody. Now, thanks to the centre, I know a lot of people and am friendly with some of them. We babysit for one another and ask one another to dinner. It's great!

There are numerous opportunities for the parents to meet one another: over a cup of coffee in the morning, while collecting the children in the evening, at meetings or weekend activities on behalf of the centre. There are birthday and Christmas parties and trips. Children make friends, parents see one another outside the centre. All this enables the adults to talk about other subjects than children, and also to adjust to parenthood by realising that the problems they face are not unique. Friendships made through a centre can last long after the children have left it. This network offers an important support system when traditional family structures are weakening.

Though the role of the professional staff in a parent run centre is not easy, they do benefit from the considerable autonomy they enjoy within its structure. They also benefit from the quality of contact with families which enables them to get to know the children well and helps them to avoid mistakes based on ignorance, or on misunderstanding of a child's background. One of the greatest benefits is the appreciation of their work by parents who are not merely consumers, but who work alongside them, sharing the trials and tribulations of the job. If the centres have enough money they will pay their professional staff better than traditional day care centres. But if the reverse is true, the professionals will earn less and their working conditions are liable to be more difficult.

At the heart of it all: 'empowerment'

> The parent run day care association should enable its members to become proficient in manipulating the rules of the game. This should not only be a means to acquiring greater powers for ordinary citizens over the State system and the market economy, but also to acquiring greater choice for consumers with regard to life styles and goals, whether these are personal or communal.[1]

1. *Elements pour une politique favorisant la participation parentale*, Solange Passaris, 'Parent participation in early childhood day care options', CIRED, 1987

Involvement in centres offers parents the chance to acquire new skills in administration and management. Though not all parents will take part in these, most attend meetings when centre policy is being discussed. In this way they become familiar with the formalities of management, and are introduced to practices they may encounter in the professional world.

We parents have very heavy responsibilities for budgeting and negotiating. It is not fair that we should work as volunteers and the centre still gets less money than the municipal crèches where parents just drop their kids.

Most of us have to deal with a severe lack of funds. It is difficult to manage a big budget and be forced to go to the bank and ask for credit because the normal funds have been delayed.

If the authorities hadn't seen that so many parents wanted the centre to open, they would never have given their consent. They used to say that there was no real need for such a facility. Now the centre is always full and sometimes we're unhappy because there is a waiting list. The professional always tries to give everyone a chance, but some days it is impossible.

Once parents start to participate in local development and to provide a service, they also begin to exercise their rights as citizens. They are no longer content simply to formulate needs and wishes, but want to take active steps to see that their desires are fulfilled. This can be a threatening prospect for the authorities and may be the reason why they are often uncooperative. Subsidised child care is a comparatively recent phenomenon in society and brings with it an interpretation of male and female roles which might be alien to some politicians. The phenomenon of parent run day care centres is a laboratory for a social experiment in direct democracy controlled by the members.

Families may start out discussing education and end up considering the values they have in common. They have small differences between them, perhaps, but they share enough assumptions and ideas to form a basis for their educational theories. The fact that parents are concerned for the wellbeing of their children means that they will examine their present environment and question what will happen to the children later. The choices they make, therefore, are not just in response to immediate needs, but also with a view to what can be accomplished in the future.

In a day care centre parents build close relationships with each other based on a shared view of the world. A group identity grows and helps to counteract the sense of isolation and anonymity prevalent in big cities and sparsely populated rural areas. This redefining of social relationships offers ideas for provision for other groups, like adolescents, elderly people and people with disabilities, and is one of the special achievements of parent run day care centres for young children.

Issues and problems

Each parent run day care centre is both an association of shared interests and a smallscale commercial venture. This dichotomy can be a problem: operating as a business can be uncomfortable for a non-profit making organisation, and it can mean that some centres are not taken seriously by the bodies responsible for funding them – illustrated by the fact that some local authorities allocate the same amount to parent run day care centres as they do to the local bowls club! As a business, a centre will be creating full or part-time employment for one to three people, and these jobs are usually permanent. Centres rarely close, except in rural areas with declining birthrates.

The other constraints on centres can be summed up in two words: time and money. It often takes so long to set up a centre that the children of the people who originally supported the idea are old enough to go to school. The amount of time spent on running a centre, maintaining premises, keeping things going, is enormous. Parents offer varying amounts of time to centres, and mothers spend

far more time there than fathers – and less time at jobs. ACEPP has been campaigning to persuade employers to offer flexible working schedules to the parents of young children. Until this is realised, many parents will be unable to contribute to day care centres.

Some children attend centres every day, others sporadically. Some centres serve more than one hundred families with only 16 places, and some children can only attend twice a month. It is obviously more difficult for parents to form close relationships under these circumstances, unless they make a tremendous effort. The length of time a child attends a centre also varies. Some come for a few months before starting school, others begin at a very early age. In the latter case parents are more likely to become involved in the centre. There is a major period of change every year, after the long summer holidays.

Parents at a centre with secure funding are more inclined to participate in the association. If an association is in constant financial straits, or uncertain from year to year about the renewal of funding, parents are hesitant, even scared, to become involved. The centres, regional branches, and ACEPP have asked for benefits equivalent to those allocated by CAF: a daily rate per child present. According to a poll conducted in 1988 of 219 parent run centres, this daily rate operates in 15 municipalities and 18 district authorities only: this includes the 10 Paris centres, where municipal and regional benefits are combined. Seventy-four per cent of the centres receive no aid from district authorities, and 27 per cent receive none from the municipality. Those centres without local authority support have trouble making ends meet, and this has a bad effect on the whole group.

The work of ACEPP

Promoting development

From the start, ACEPP felt it essential to collect together all the know-how that had been accumulated in setting up the early centres, which was exchanged through meetings and through the house magazine, *La Gazette*. Information on planning, setting up and launching a project was gathered from the experience of those who had been through the process. The information was collated into a manual entitled *The practical guide for parent run day care centres*, which was brought out in 1985. It is an instruction manual for setting up, equipping and administering a centre, and includes everything from forming an association, looking for premises, keeping records, drawing up a budget, engaging staff, managing accounts, avoiding pitfalls, negotiating the judicial and administrative procedures, to planning the use of space and the day-to-day running of a centre. Some centres kept records of educational projects and these were circulated by ACEPP as models for other groups to use.

To improve the support services for the growing number of centres, ACEPP negotiated agreements with a savings bank, an insurance company and a building society. In 1984 the first Regional Round Table Conference was organised in the Ile de France, bringing together representatives from the centres and officials from educational and administrative departments like DDASS, CAF and the municipalities. During this conference the representatives from the centres were able to show that their operating difficulties were due to lack of funding. This conference was followed by others in the provinces and they often resulted in the creation of a district or provincial branch of ACEPP. At present there are 20 district or provincial associations which support new initiatives in their areas, represent parent run centres locally and defend their interests.

ACEPP has been able to draw up agreements with ministries to increase the number and improve the quality of parent run day care centres, of which there

are, at present, about 800 in France. Not all are members of ACEPP, but all operate in similar ways and have, at one time or another, used ACEPP's information service. ACEPP is essentially a group of organisations. It promotes educational research and aims to improve society's perceptions and treatment of young children. ACEPP has become associated with other child care organisations, both public and private. Through these links the task has moved beyond that of representing members' views and extends to defending the rights of children and the family.

In 1988 ACEPP organised a forum, *L'Enfant, une responsabilité partagée* (The child – a shared responsibility), under the patronage of various ministers, which publicised the educational values on which its work was based. These values have become the basis of a new approach to social provision. It would now be unthinkable to exclude parents from educational programmes, even though there remain practical difficulties to their involvement.

Encouraging dialogue

In a parent run centre the respective roles of parents and professionals are defined through discussion and constant readjustment, on a day to day basis. The role of the professional is not limited to working with children. It also involves developing and maintaining a dialogue with the adults, and ensuring that all activities and policies are properly coordinated.

Officially the professional has technical responsibility for the centre, for the quality of service it provides and for safety. The relationship with parents is reached by consensus between parents and professionals and is based on a spirit of willingness by both sides to work together.

Providing training

Existing child care training does not prepare professionals to collaborate with families. Normally the professionals would be working in institutions where their place in the official hierarchy is strictly defined. Although the first parent run centres were started mainly by parents themselves, there is a change towards professionals taking the initiative and 'recruiting' parents. The danger is that as they set up 'their' centres, parental initiative will be stifled.

In order to help professionals in parent run centres to think about their role, and to avoid the tendency to reduce parental participation, ACEPP has developed on-site training, for both professional staff and for parents. The aim is to help both sides gain a clear idea of their respective roles, and to help them maintain a balanced relationship. This training scheme touches on aspects of daily life as well as on the administrative aspects of a centre. Trainees learn by their own experiences, which are related to theories of child development. The centres also offer practical work experience to young, unemployed people through government schemes. Since 1988 people under the age of 26 have been able to study part-time through the centres for a diploma in child care, to improve their chances of finding work in the field. Training is also provided to parents who volunteer to help with the administration and management of centres.

Training schemes make financial demands which can prove a strain, especially for newly opened centres. To overcome this, ACEPP negotiated with the Ministry of Social Affairs, in 1988, for a series of training schemes to be carried out jointly by professionals from the PMI and its own trainers. It is likely that this training will be financed in the future by the district authorities. In the long term ACEPP hopes to provide training for the directors of parent run centres, but this idea is meeting with some resistance from existing training schemes.

Working in the poorest areas

In the beginning the parent run centre movement was largely urban and Parisian, but it soon spread throughout the country. Its flexible approach could be adapted to various needs – as a full or part time crèche, a day nursery or a mixture of these. Because the centres did not need special premises or high levels of funding, they could be set up more or less anywhere, particularly in areas where there was no child care at all, like suburbs, small towns and villages. The only day care option in some areas, the centres tapped an enormous pool of families who were not necessarily advocates of parent participation initially. These were people who were used to being consumers of the educational product, but who learned to be producers as well and were soon working in partnership with professionals and other institutions in their areas.

> I didn't like the idea of being active in the day care centre. I wanted to be able to go to work without feeling bad: I certainly didn't want more work and more problems. Then I started to enjoy it because the atmosphere was so different from work it was a release.
>
> I feel I learn a lot when I come and work with the children just by looking at the way the professionals do it. I didn't know I could do such a lot with my baby. Once the children played with glue and seed and made really nice pictures – and my baby is only 18 months old.

The number of parents choosing this kind of day care has grown to the point that a survey was carried out in the Rhones-Alpes area in 1985. It showed that parents who use the centres generally fall in the professional categories. Before access to centres is completely democratic, certain problems have to be overcome. These are:

- ignorance about parent run day care facilities:
  although they are widespread now, too few local authorities understand how parent run centres operate and still think that they are private organisations catering to a small élite;

- slow procedures for obtaining funding:
  though procedures are now established, the red-tape involved in securing local authority subsidies can discourage people from setting up a centre;

- timetables:
  it is difficult for people to obtain enough free time from their jobs to work in the centre. Parents are asked to commit six to eight hours a week on average, and many have to take part-time work or add the hours to an existing workload. And this time commitment is required from the start; the benefits and joys of parental participation will only come later;

- administrative complexities:
  for example setting up and managing a filing system. One or two parents in a group often have some administrative experience, but it can be a problem when nobody has this experience;

- insufficient public funding:
  there is often a sizeable difference between the charges of different centres, depending on whether they are part of a contractual scheme or not, whether they are getting funding from the local municipality and whether they have rent-free premises. Financial contributions from families will vary according to these circumstances. Some centres have to make ends meet by charging rates which effectively exclude poor families.

ACEPP has always been committed to making parent run centres available to as wide a public as possible, and has used the media to inform the public about them so that it becomes aware of the value of this kind of day care. To raise awareness among the general public and to improve communications between centres themselves, ACEPP opened a teletext information service in 1988 supported by central government. ACEPP has demonstrated that, given the proper technical support, a parent run centre enables families who are having problems in bringing up children fit into the community.

Applying the model to disadvantaged and migrant families

Recognising the problem

As early as 1984, it was apparent that some new centres were meeting with ignorance and reservation from local officials. The Ministry of Social Affairs asked ACEPP to organise information sessions for the PMI doctors responsible for recognising crèches and day care centres, in the hope that they would see the importance of the centres and begin to stimulate the local officials. Five regional sessions were organised, and more than 20 doctors and child care workers attended each one.

At the end, a joint statement on the establishment of parent run day care was issued by ACEPP and the Ministry. It concluded that parent run day care, by its very nature, tended to involve those families who were capable of protecting their own interests. Statistics showed that collective day care in general catered mainly for the children of middle and upper class families. Very few disadvantaged families and virtually no immigrant families were reached by collective day care. Among the immigrant families there were several reasons for this: not being aware of the existence of these facilities, a fear of institutions and difficulty in knowing how and when to make an approach. The management of the crèches and centres themselves, tended to favour families with comfortable incomes: centres were uncommon in low-income and immigrant areas. There was an obvious need to involve these families in every form of early childhood provision.

While ACEPP believed that parent run centres were suitable for all families from all socio-economic groups, there was difficulty in obtaining finance for new centres in poor areas. The first informal contacts with potential funders made it clear that there were doubts about the idea. Parent run day care centres were too recent a phenomenon to attract the extra finance needed to establish centres in disadvantaged areas.

Getting support

In 1986 ACEPP met with the Bernard van Leer Foundation and found that it shared a similar approach to child care, believing that it should be low-budget and of a format that could be reproduced easily and economically. Both believe that the child's needs should be paramount; that there should be an easy and flexible transition from family to crèche, and, especially, that parents should work together with professional educators as partners in their children's education. This was a very stimulating discovery for both sides and for ACEPP it meant a unique opportunity to join an international network which shared the same basic principles.

In June 1986 ACEPP organised a one day national presentation of a proposed project for migrant and disadvantaged groups for the benefit of representatives of official organisations and of associations working with migrant groups. The project met with interest, even though the concept of the parent run centre was still perceived as the day care solution for well-to-do families. Nonetheless, the

Fonds d'Action Sociale and the Ministry of Social Affairs committed themselves – as did the Bernard van Leer Foundation – to financing the proposed project for an experimental period of three years.

The general situation

Like many European countries, France faces the problem of integrating socially disadvantaged and minority groups into society as a whole. It is recognised that these marginalised groups cannot and should not be seen as a small minority known as the 'poor', to be assisted through 'charity'. They are no longer either small in number nor homogenous in nature. The disadvantaged now come from many different social strata, and some may have suddenly found themselves in their new condition, due to the recurrent economic crises of the 1970s onwards, and the resultant huge rises in unemployment levels.

Originally the migrant worker phenomonon was one of reciprocal benefit: industries in growing economies got low paid workforces, and the migrants could earn what to them were reasonable incomes, against the hope of returning to their own countries one day. But the number of jobs for migrants has been shrinking for some time while often worsening conditions in their home countries have impelled more to leave and fewer to return. Many indeed cannot return for economic and/or political reasons.

The disadvantaged and migrant groups are often concentrated in particular areas of high unemployment and poor housing with inadequate services. Tension between the indigenous and migrant groups is increasing, often resulting in racial hostility and even violence. Increasing rates of crime, drug abuse and suicide are the evidence of the despair in these areas. Children in these communities grow up with feelings of hopelessness for the future and bitterness about the present.

The statistics

The migrant situation in France changes constantly. The last available official population figures date from the 1981 census (the 1991 figures were not available at the time of writing). It is likely that the proportion of immigrants, particularly those from Europe and Africa, is now even higher. Table 4 shows the 1981 situation.

Table 4: Immigrants in France

Reasons given for migrating were: economic – one-third of immigrants; family reasons – one-third; political – one-sixth; and the rest for other motives. A

Place of origin	Percentage of immigrant population
Europe	47.8
Portugal	20.8
Africa	42.8
Algeria	21.6
Morocco	11.7
Tunisia	5.1
Asia	8.0
Turkey	3.4

There are approximately 4,000,000 immigrants who make up 6.9 per cent of the total population.

quarter of all immigrants, especially women, are handicapped by a poor grasp of the French language.

Characteristics

- Distribution:
  immigration is essentially an urban phenomenon, with nearly 14 per cent of all foreigners living in Paris and only 1.7 per cent in rural areas. In the Paris and Saint-Denis area the number of foreigners increased by approximately 7 per cent during the period from 1975 to 1982. Paris and the Basse Vallee du Rhone are the most popular areas for immigrants, followed by Haute and Basse Normandie, Brittany and the Loire, areas which used to have no immigrant population but now welcome them. The Nord-Pas de Calais and the Lorraine have seen a decline in the number of immigrants due to the economic recession.

- Age:
  the immigrant population is younger than the French population. Large families, now rare among the French, are common among immigrants. Only 4 per cent of French families have four children, compared to 27 per cent of immigrant families, though the number of children decreases with the second generation immigrant families.

- Employment:
  immigrant workers are particularly numerous in urban service industries, and 50 per cent of unskilled workers in Paris are immigrants. They also make up 10.6 per cent of unemployed people. Building, civil engineering and commercial industries account for 40 per cent of foreign workers, and they are more numerous than French workers on shift-work in industry. Foreigners comprise 32 per cent of the semi-skilled labour force.

- Housing:
  61 per cent of the total immigrant population live in apartment blocks, (25 per cent in subsidised housing), and 80 per cent live in rented accommodation, in contrast to less than 50 per cent of the French population.

- Women:
  between 1975 and 1991 the female immigrant population increased by 14 per cent because of family reunification; the highest increase being among the Turkish population. Although the employment rate for all immigrants fell from 46 per cent to 42 per cent between 1975 and 1982, the employment rate for female immigrants increased from 21.6 per cent to 23.4 per cent. The textile industry employed 36.5 per cent of immigrant women, and the retail sector 46.8 per cent. More than 50 per cent of immigrant women workers are in unskilled employment, (75 per cent of workers with the worst conditions are women). Women head 77 per cent of the 42,400 single parent immigrant families.

- Education:
  statistics on educational achievement and social origins in France show a close link between the social and professional status of heads of household and the educational achievements of their children. Children from immigrant families where the head of household belongs to the lower levels of the social hierarchy achieve the same results as French children from the same social stratum. For example, the number of children of skilled workers admitted to the final year of secondary school between 1972 and 1974 showed the following percentages:

French	14.8 per cent
Foreigners born in France	20.5 per cent
Foreigners born outside France	14.5 per cent

At nursery school, 10 per cent of the children are from immigrant families. At secondary school the percentage drops to 6.4 per cent.[2]

Of children of senior executives and white-collar workers, 71.8 per cent will go on to higher education, compared with 4.2 per cent of children born to blue-collar and public service workers. And of 1,000 children of blue-collar workers who enter the sixth grade of secondary school, only 166 will obtain their final leaving qualification, the *baccalaureat*, as compared to 641 from the higher social classes.

Factors influencing educational attainment

Socio-economic factors are important in determining academic success, but there are other influencing factors:

- education of parents: particularly of the mother (in immigrant families, parents who have enjoyed social and professional standing in their own country can find themselves regarded as unqualified in the French setting);
- numbers of children;
- type of environment: urban or rural, inner city or suburb;
- gender: girls do better than boys at first but have greater trouble in finding work;
- degree of pre-school education: immigrant families, realising this, have begun to place their children early in nursery schools;
- parents' ability to speak French;
- parents' participation in an integration project;
- parents' ability to discuss the children's educational progress with teaching staff.

The ACEPP-Bernard van Leer Foundation Project

The three year experimental project planned to address many of the factors limiting educational attainment among young disadvantaged migrants identified in the previous section.

Objectives

The objectives of the project were to:

- create day care centres in disadvantaged areas which would give children an opportunity to develop in ways to suit their specific needs;
- improve the children's command of language and their ability to socialise with other children, so that they can make the transition to school more easily and are better prepared to deal with formal education;
- make parents more aware of their children's need for stimulation and to encourage them to participate in their children's education;
- find ways of integrating immigrant and/or disadvantaged families into society.

Methods

In the light of the available resources, it was decided that the project should be targeted on four regions. Those selected were: Rhone Alpes, Languedoc

2 Migrants Formation, No. 71, December 1987

Rousillon, Midi Pyrenees, and Brittany. In each region meetings were held to introduce the project to local officials, including the CAF, the PMI, local councillors and representatives of other groups. The meetings also determined the precise targeting of the project in four specific areas. These were: Les Minguettes/Venissieux in Lyons, the village of Redessan in the district of Le Gard, the Izards neighbourhood in Toulouse and the Quimill area of Chateaulin. Finding all the sites and preparing the premises took a year.

Surveys were carried out in these areas to determine a profile of the families who lived there; training needs among women; educational support needs; and what would be needed to activate the local community. The surveys also served to inform families about parent run day care centres, to talk to them about their interest and participation in the project. These results were collected and analysed in a separate report.[3]

The same technique was used at a later stage to establish centres in all areas.

Technical support

In each of the four project areas , a team was set up, comprised of:

- a coordinator, who was responsible for negotiating with local officials, finding premises and setting up an administrative system; and
- a professional worker, who contacted families and involved parents in group discussions on education.

There were modifications to this arrangement in some areas, however. At Venissieux, ACEPP invited a day care centre which was threatened with closure to join and run a parent run centre in collaboration with the project. At Chateaulin it was suggested to a group of parents, who had recently opened a centre on a housing estate where a large number of foreign nationals lived, (Turks, Asians and Malagasys) that they should admit immigrants.

Operations

Families were usually quick to join the project, but many had to come to terms with the house rules for parent run centres, and this was not easy. It was a major problem for professionals to be welcoming to families, and to tell them the basic rules without frightening them away. Another difficulty was that in recruiting parents who would be actively involved in the centre, there was a risk of discouraging other parents, who had not understood at the outset how important it was for them to participate. These parents were often those who had multiple problems.

A basic operating principle was to keep a balance between places reserved for children attending full-time and those attending part-time. The surveys indicated that families were likely to be in temporary employment and would need provision upon which they could fall back. A preference for full-time attendance, because it was more profitable for the centre and better for group relationships, meant that there would be fewer opportunities for women to use the part-time option, either to make a preliminary approach to the centre or to have a breathing space if they were not working.

In Redessan and Chateaulin it soon became apparent that contact with immigrant families would not be possible without making special efforts to attract the women, who would not otherwise use the day care of their own accord. Courses in sewing, literacy and cookery were organised. In Redessan the school parents' association joined forces with the Ballon Rouge day care centre to provide a tutoring service because some mothers had said that their children were having problems at school. At Quimill, a suburb of Chateaulin, in a joint

3. Published as *Creation de structure d'accueil a participation parentale en milieu defavorise pour enfants de 0 a 6 ans* (The creation of parent run day care centres in disadvantaged areas for children from 0 to 6 years of age), report of the preliminary survey, ACEPP, May 1987

venture involving ACEPP and funded by the local council, district authorities, the CAF, *Habitation a Loyer Modere* (HLM, Low Rent Accommodation) and the *Fondation de France*, a playground was constructed at the centre by young people from a local housing estate, supervised by a team leader. The work took over a year to complete and served as a pretext for parties and get-togethers in an unattractive outer suburb area which had otherwise very little social activity. A social and cultural centre in Chateaulin itself offered a wide range of activities but was seldom used by residents of Quimill. This social centre joined with the day care centre, Nid de Couscous, to decentralise some of the activities and to take over the workshops which the day care centre had set up.

The introduction of day care centres often had a beneficial effect on the neighbourhoods and villages where they were situated.

Training

A system of continuous staff training throughout the three years of the project helped the teams of fieldworkers to introduce the new parent run day care centre approach to education and social work, and to ensure that the centres and related activities were coordinated. ACEPP's team met every five weeks or so with the local teams, and spent two days on planning and training. At these two-day meetings, the ACEPP team received progress reports, and helped find solutions to problems that had arisen. A chosen theme was also discussed and analysed.

An experimental project of this size, with several programmes running concurrently, could not be carried out without a system of supervision and training. It was essential to maintain a consistent approach and to provide support to fieldworkers, who were expected to make heavy personal commitments. A member of the national team always had to be prepared to respond to requests for help. The fieldworkers also attended symposia on multicultural issues sponsored by various outside organisations.

Training for parents was provided in two forms. Firstly, the coordinators helped parents understand what functioning as an association meant, and secondly, they helped parents understand the educational process and the way that they could be involved in it. At first these two aspects were not always dealt with separately. Meetings between coordinators, professionals and parents might, for example, have been spent discussing the problem of late payments, the choice of new equipment, or plans for a trip to the zoo or the countryside.

Solving problems

Such discussions led, among other things, to innovative solutions to problems. In Venisieux the Arc en Ciel Centre was burgled four times and the video-recorder, cassettes and toys were stolen. It was clear that these break-ins were the work of local young people. The first reaction was to consider how to get the adults to assume collective responsibility. Then someone had the idea of getting the young people involved in the day care centre. This would mean providing some activity at the centre that would interest and help them. The ACEPP project had been planning to make a video, and it was suggested that audio-visual training workshops be held, and the trainees recruited from among the local youth could help to make the film.

This project was approved by the *Fonds d'Action Sociale* (FAS) and the Ministry of Youth and Sports. The centre coordinators contacted schools in the neighbourhood and selected trainees: young people with educational problems; an equal number of French and immigrant people of both sexes; those aged 14 to 18. The training lasted one week in each centre and was given by the team making the video. Part of the time was spent in reconnoitring the area, and here the local knowledge of the young people proved invaluable. An ACEPP

representative who was responsible for the whole audio-visual project, went from centre to centre during the training week, to work with parents on the content of the film and the shooting details. The trainees also made a five minute video of their own, using a scenario that they had written. Two of the schools involved are continuing with the project. In one an audio-visual department was set up, and a trainee given the job of running it. In another the trainees' film was shown to the school, followed by a discussion.

Issues, lessons, and achievements

In 1989, after three years of field work, an evaluation was carried out, which brought together data on matters such as children's attendance, parental participation, and family socio-cultural profiles. In addition, case studies of particular children and their families were compiled, and a report was produced based on the findings and observations of an external observer who spent a week with each of the four centres. Finally, in 1990, the views of parents were collected through a series of interviews.

From this material, lessons could be drawn, and issues and achievements identified. Some of the main principles that emerged were the following.

Attendance

Attendance by children is more regular in centres situated in urban areas than in those in rural areas. In the latter, it takes longer for people to get used to the existence of day care centres, and needs for them are less evident due to the continued presence and strength of networks of parents and relatives.

Flexibility on the part of centres to offer full-time or part-time care is of great value. Parents' working patterns and demands tend to fluctuate, and may be punctuated, for example, by a part-time worker going on a full-time training course for a period. Centres which are flexible enough to accomodate this – by having a child full-time for the duration – can help a great deal.

Parental participation

The fact that parental participation is a 'rule' may not necessarily mean that it is respected. It cannnot be demanded, as some parents may have no time at all to help, others may not feel confident enough to work alongside professionals, and yet others may not be skilled in planning their time. While the professional staff have to remind parents of the need and value of their involvement, this has to be done sensitively, as parents could be offended. Professionals need to make any parents involved feel comfortable and useful, which requires both creativity and patience. At the Toulouse centre, for example, meals were normally cooked by a paid worker every day except Mondays. Parents were asked to take it in turn to cook the Monday meals. After a period of difficulty and adjustment, Mondays became an intercultural event – one week the meal would be Portuguese, then Magrebian, then Creole, and then French.

In centres where parental involvement was slow to develop, professional staff found that they themselves had to take the lead in proposing activities, such as refurnishing, buying new toys, or arranging outside activities. These 'prompts' gradually helped parents to get involved.

Parents were supposed to attend monthly evening meetings to discuss the centre's activities. Except for those who were relatively active in the centre, it was generally found difficult to motivate parents to come; in some cases husbands did not like the idea of their wives being outside at night. Meetings

associated with festive occasions like Carnival and Christmas were found more popular.

Participation of disadvantaged and migrant families

In general, higher proportions of disadvantaged families participated in the two most urbanised project centres (Venissieux and Toulouse) than in the centres in Redessan and Chateaulin. The urban centres were more specifically targetted on defined small housing areas, and were located in these areas: they were thus more easily accessible. Tables 5 and 6 illustrate the differences.

Table 5: Percentage of families using the four centres with one or both parents unemployed

Centres	Percentage
Venissieux	24
Toulouse	17
Redessan	9
Chateaulin	5
[cf National percentage is 9]	

Table 6: Percentage of single parent families using the four centres

Centres	Percentage
Venissieux	20.0
Toulouse	19.0
Redessan	15.5
Chateaulin	5.0
[cf National percentage is 10]	

The low figures for Chateaulin were influenced by two further factors. First, women who did not work did not necessarily declare themselves as unemployed. Second, Chateaulin charged the highest rates of the four centres, reflecting the low local authority financial support.

Participation by migrant families was also at higher levels in the two urban areas. In Toulouse, half the families had one or both parents who were either born overseas or born of overseas parents in France. In Venissieux, 30 per cent of the families were mixed. In Redessan however, where most migrant women did not work, few migrant families were involved, and in Chateaulin, the women (predominantly Turkish) used the centre to meet, but would not leave their children there. However, as some began to work, they gained the confidence to leave their children, perhaps as a result of meeting at the centre.

Working in a multicultural context

The centres are local facilities and as such they must accept all families without discrimination. The main problem is to avoid favouring those families who have adapted easily to life at the day care centre because it is familiar to them, or favouring those who have difficulty in integrating. Either way could lead to the 'ghettoising' of the centre and the group. Those parents who become involved in the association are often more at ease culturally, and can exert an authority which can degenerate into an abuse of power. On the other hand, parents who have experienced social failure are vulnerable and less able to find their place in group life. The major difference between the two groups is not nationality or race; it is individual levels of culture and education. The centres bring together

both groups: people who possess social skills and people who find social situations difficult. In Venissieux and Toulouse, it was several women of foreign origin who took on work for the association because they had the necessary level of culture and education, while some French parents found it difficult to become involved in the social interaction of the centre.

A fundamental question is whether the day care centres should be promoting one particular kind of education. Should they reflect a diversity of family cultures and traditions, or should they be 'neutral'? And in the latter case, who decides what is good or bad for the children?

Professional workers have to take both approaches into account. They have to maintain a balance of power, preventing the exclusion of parents who are not interested in children's needs, or of whom they have a low opinion. There are always problems with parents who do not pay, or who pay late, or who fail to turn up for their weekly duty, with or without reason or without giving sufficient notice. There are parents whose anti-social attitudes attract group disapproval – for example, irritability, neglecting to pick up children on time, being suspected of ill-treating children. Sometimes this kind of behaviour makes the other parents ill at ease and can lead to the rejection of the offending individuals.

Some children, too, display behaviour problems like interminable crying, difficulties with eating and sleeping, aggressive behaviour towards other children or listlessness and withdrawal, which lead to people avoiding them at the centre. The professionals have to collaborate with each other and with the parents, to devise group strategies to deal with the adults or the children who are causing the difficulties. This demands clear sightedness, objectivity and diplomacy. In Venissieux and Toulouse some teams decided to ask a mediator to help them to analyse the problems and look for appropriate answers. The other centres are also looking for solutions to these kinds of difficulties.

To help parents operate as joint members of the team, professional staff must be able to accept the fact that, initially, parents will make mistakes. The professionals have to make the most of positive elements and discuss the problems with tact. The exchange of knowledge is not a one-way process, and centre staff can benefit from the diversity of skills offered by parents. At Venissieux, one mother gave puppet performances, and in Redessan a father who was a doctor helped a mother to plan a healthier diet for her child. In Toulouse the mothers take turns in preparing meals, and the menu varies according to their individual tastes and culinary traditions. In Chateaulin a Laotian mother played music from her native country on the guitar.

> I think it is very difficult for immigrant women to integrate. They cannot really give up their old ways, even if they want to, because of pressure from the family. The communities got together for the first time at the party – they had never met before.
>
> I thought the immigrant women were very different, but the more I learn about them, the more I realise that cultural differences are just another way to cope with the same problems and I am not always sure that we Western women are doing so well.
>
> I did not like the multicultural idea, I was suspicious. But when you get to know people personally you find out that they are just like you, but different, and you feel more inclined to help them if they need it.

Last, but not least, is the problem that arises when professional staff have to discuss their working conditions with parents in their role as managers: flexible timetables, an extra day off, the need to buy new equipment, a pay rise and so on. The parents can sometimes behave in an authoritarian manner and staff can

feel offended and hurt, because they are trying to maintain good relations with these same people when they are working together with the children. Combining responsibility for a centre with a range of complex interpersonal relationships can be extremely exhausting for professional staff, especially since neither status nor salary reflect the value of their work. It has been estimated that the professional workers' time should be split: 25 hours a week working with the children, and 5 hours on meetings, preparation and research. At present, finding funding for the 5 hours is a problem.

The implications of working in the multicultural context for professional staff

At the centres, the job of the professional staff has four aspects: caring for the children; guiding parents; supervising trainees; and undertaking external relations. It amounts to a difficult job, that requires a great deal of commitment especially as the status of the job and its salary are not high. Ideally, the centres need two or even three professional staff members working as a team, sharing the stress and strain, and helping each other. Having more than one professional prevents those working on their own from having too much power.

Professional training prepares staff for the child care aspect of their job, but not for the other three aspects. These involve, in particular, being able to guide groups of parents without imposing pre-determined attitudes and practices; and establishing and maintaining partnerships with funders, social workers, and local institutions and organisations.

To do all this, professional staff need two types of training and support. First, they need a means of gaining access to the ideas and experience of others. Second, regular supervision, especially to help with difficult situations. Here, it should be noted that professionals sometimes have to face problems involving domestic violence and child abuse. In Toulouse, a 'solidarity' committee was established to help parents and professionals deal with these situations.

Links and relationships with others

Social workers
Social workers tended initially to be distrustful of the new parent run day care centres, but this decreased as time went on. Indeed, they even started to use the centres to care for children in cases such as when a mother recovered custody of a child, or where fathers had been left alone with disturbed or emotionally retarded children. This form of official use has not been recognised officially through the allocation of increased financial resources. While the Venissieux centre received a special allocation for the children of single mothers, the Toulouse centre only received additional funding much later.

Schools
The centres always ask schools to welcome new children and parents in advance of the children starting there. This depends very much on the goodwill of the teachers. In Redessan for example, the school was very negative towards the centre for the first two years; but when the headteacher changed, so did the negative attitude. Now the school and the centre cooperate regularly.

Other associations
Every centre has links with other local associations. The Redessan centre is part of a larger grouping of child care centres which meet regularly for training sessions and cooperate to organise events such as a children's art festival. In Toulouse the centre was heavily involved in a cultural event, *Izouville – une ville à la dimension de l'enfant* (Izouville – a town tailor made for children), in which a large number of local people participated. Led by designers and professionals, children of all ages created houses and exhibited them at an open-

air festival for the local community, at which story-tellers, clowns and musicians also performed.

Economic effects on families

The establishment of these centres, especially those in the most disadvantaged areas, have had direct economic effects for the families involved. Women who had previously not intended, or bothered, to look for work or training opportunities began to do so. Some, after their training courses, asked the centres to take them on as trainees. As they gained confidence, some women became able to deal with their own domestic situation. In Chateaulin for example, a Laotian woman who had been beaten every day by her alcoholic husband worked for six months at the centre, and from this gained the confidence and strength to leave her home with her children and move to another town where she found a job. She wrote to the professional at the centre, offering thanks 'for the courage I built from your company.'

Finance

Compared to other forms of day care provision, parent run centres are cheap, mainly because a great deal of work, from cleaning to bookkeeping, is done by volunteers. Working with the disadvantaged often means that the professionals need to do more: they cannot necessarily count on the degree of parental participation found in other areas, for the reasons that have been described. Indeed, to quote from one professional:

> Some parents need so much attention that they cannot be considered as extra help but, on the contrary, an extra demand on my time, especially when they are mothers who are in trouble.

ACEPP has now been fighting for 10 years to secure better financing for centres, but the pattern of support is still very uncertain. Even where finance is made available, problems arise when it only arrives at the end of the year. Although everyone involved agree that the centres are effective, and municipalities are always anxious for centres to participate in political exhibitions of municipal achievement, this is not reflected either in the extent of financial support, or the conditions attached to its provision. Even the four project centres were still experiencing financial difficulties after three years of operation.

Conclusions

It is indisputable that parent run centres can reach families who do not use state run day care. Community day care centres are so successful that all have now had to introduce waiting lists. The possibility of organising a relay system of a group of childminders is now being considered. For the ACEPP/ Bernard van Leer Foundation project, it was necessary to set up an extensive support system which is now indispensable. Other forms of day care, similar to parent run centres, may prove to be necessary, especially in rural areas.

Much has been learned about working in areas of special need. For example, care must be taken not to start by setting rigid rules about participation: if they put people off, professional help will have to be found to plug the gaps. Budgets for setting up and running centres in these areas may be different from the typical centre model. The equipment budget must include the technical support needed in planning and setting up a centre, and the operating budget must plan for higher salary costs and lower income from families.

The attitude of officialdom is also starting to change. In the beginning there was a 'wait and see' approach, but now most authorities have accepted the system and support it. In some cases organisations came together for the first time over

a centre, and this has led to a re-think of the work of the child care professions. Nevertheless, there is still much to be done to persuade statutory authorities to give financial support. It should be possible to make a good case for the long term economic benefits of centres – mothers are able to work, so families need less state aid, and, if family incomes increase as a result, there are fewer health problems and children get on better at school. But establishing these links will require a longterm study which might take several years.

The first phase of the ACEPP/Bernard van Leer Foundation project aimed to create and observe the conditions under which a parent run day care service could meet the needs of children and parents in disadvantaged areas. In fact, much more was achieved. There were economic effects; people were empowered and enabled to stand up for their rights and meet their own needs. More generally, the centres played an important role in improving local conditions. In Redessan for example, the centre was initially viewed with mistrust by the local community. Indeed its inter-cultural objectives were seen as provocative at a time (1987) of increased hostility towards migrants and the rise of extreme right-wing nationalism. The centre's sign was riddled with bullet holes. Three years later, when the centre organised a cultural festival, the whole village attended.

Looking to the future

During the three years of the project, a great deal of know-how was developed, and ACEPP is now endeavouring to pass this on to other organisations. This does not mean replicating a model, but adapting an idea geared specifically to the needs of other disadvantaged areas in the context of growing political and public concern about poverty and social breakdown.

The dissemination programme is essentially aimed at showing how child care provision through a parent run centre is not just a way of providing care, but of gaining an entry into dealing with other social and economic problems. Thus, ACEPP's concern is with community involvement in the broadest sense. Many people support community involvement in general terms, but few actually practice it, and there is institutional resistance to it.

The pain that people at the margin of society feel comes from a combination of a sense of fatalism, powerlessness and hopelessness. The pain is greater for those who bear children. Young children are a powerful stimulus to people trying to meet their needs for survival and to develop their potential. Thus parent run centres have dual objectives: to overcome child deprivation and help children reach their full potential, and, at the same time, to empower and assist their parents and their communities so that they too can reach their full potential.

A look at three parent run day care centres in Paris

In 1991 Lisa Harker, winner of a Peter Kirk Scholarship, visited a number of community crèches as part of a study on European day care provision. These are her personal impressions.

Throughout Europe, there is remarkably little parental involvement in the pre-school field. Although some facilities have parent committees, many of these same committees are restricted to consultative and advisory roles. Similarly, parent run management committees often lack any real influence, and 'parental involvement' actually means instruction of parents rather than participation by them.

In France, although some nurseries organise regular meetings with parents, such discussions usually focus on organisational issues, on problems with specific children or on forthcoming events. A traditional concern with hygiene within day care services, derived from the postwar awareness of the infant mortality rates, seems to underlie the lack of parental participation in most facilities. In a number of municipally run day care services I visited in Paris I found boundaries, real or imaginary, which excluded parents on the grounds of maintaining hygiene standards. Again, because the facilities are only available to parents who are both working, there is in any case little opportunity for families to become involved with the daily running of such day care services.

The exception are the crèches initiated and run by parents themselves. *Crèche Parentales* have been a recognised part of the French child care scene for more than 10 years and receive public funding. These crèches, usually providing about 14 places each, are managed by parents, each one of whom contributes an average of about half a day per week to the facility. Each crèche also has a number of qualified professional staff, either pediatric nurses, early childhood educators or auxiliary carers. Nevertheless, all management decisions are made by the parents themselves.

Because these initiatives in day care were, and are, intended to be flexible and meet the needs of the local community, there is no such thing as a typical *crèche parentale*. What follows, therefore, are descriptions of three very different centres in Paris, to illustrate their diversity.

Crèche Galipette

This centre is situated in the 20th *arrondisement*, a relatively poor area of Paris. It caters for 16 children aged between three months and three years. All of them attend full-time and are divided into two groups by age. Open from 08.00 until 19.00, five days a week, the crèche has four members of staff, including one domestic worker, all of whom are entitled to attend training courses organised by ACEPP.

The crèche is housed on the ground floor of a block of flats, and contains a kitchen with its own dining area, one large room with a 'book' corner and a 'quiet' corner, one room with an indoor climbing frame, and a room used for sleeping. Depending on finances, it is planned that another room be brought into service for water play.

All the families who use this crèche live nearby, many in the same block of flats that houses the facility. To be eligible, both parents must be working full-time, which means that they have to make special arrangements to also participate in the work of the crèche. Parents are required to spend the minimum of either one morning or one afternoon per week per child, that is, one five hour session in the crèche. In addition, there are monthly meetings attended by all the paid staff and the families. The administration and management are conducted by the parents through an annually elected panel consisting of a president, two vice-presidents, a treasurer and a secretary who, among other things, also help plan the crèche's activities.

Although there is a stress on promoting children's self-reliance and autonomy, there is no formal curriculum. Instead, there are programmes of visits outside the crèche sometimes to the local shops, or the library, but also to the swimming pool or sports facilities. Occasionally, special excursions are organised for the older children.

Parents pay Ffr. 1,350 (approximately US$ 270) per month per child, or Ffr. 1,145 (approximately US$ 229) when more than one child from a family attend. There are also contributions from central and local government. The fees include the cost of a hot midday meal cooked on the premises by a domestic worker, as well as snacks in the morning and afternoon. Nappies and medicines are available in the crèche, although parents usually bring their own.

Crèche Parentale du Marais

Ten parents set up this crèche, situated close to the affluent Ile de la Cité area of Paris in 1990. Together with two part-time teachers, the parents ensure that the crèche is open from 07.00 to 19.00 from Mondays to Fridays.

The small size of the crèche, which is light, airy and brightly decorated, restricts the numbers of children who can be cared for under the statutory regulations. This means, for instance, that no children under one year of age can be admitted. The crèche consists of a kitchen, a sleeping room and two play areas. One corner is designed for water play, and another is a 'quiet corner' with cushions and books. At least once a week the children go out to visit the nearby park.

Parents have to be employed to be eligible for a place, and each parent must contribute half a day's work in the crèche itself. Rotas are drawn up by the parents and, together with the staff, they decide on the activities. These vary according to the time of year, and a wall chart sets out the daily plan for each child's activities, depending on its age and needs.

Costs here are higher, at Ffr. 1,800 (approximately US$ 360) per month, which includes not only a hot meal for children but also for the parents themselves, and which families take turns to bring from their own homes.

Les Zebres de L'Atlas

This four year old crèche is situated in the tenth *arrondissement*, a very ethnically mixed community with a high proportion of French speaking foreigners. The crèche caters for 15 children, aged between 18 months and four years, and is open from 08.30 to 18.30, five days a week. There are no specific entry requirements, although everybody lives locally. Parents do not have to be employed to qualify for places for their children. Of the five parents I contacted, three were working.

Unlike the other crèches I visited, Les Zebres has more staff – two educators and five general workers – and somewhat less input from parents. There is no formal parental participation policy, but the crèche operates an 'open door' approach, inviting parents to take part in any way they wish. Some, mainly mothers, do become involved in daily activities, but others simply attend the regular meetings of parents and staff every three months. At these there are very full discussions about all aspects of running the facility, its activities and the development of the children.

The crèche is small, consisting of one main play area, a small changing area, a sleeping room and an attic used for supervised play. It is situated in a very colourful area of the city, with food markets and bargain shops nearby, and so

excursions are frequently organised for the children. But this depends on the availability of parents to help.

In this crèche, parents pay according to their income level as well as the number of children they bring to the centre. On average it amounts to Ffr. 80 (approximately US$ 16) a day, or Ffr. 160 (approximately US$ 32) a month per child.

The three examples I visited illustrate the diversity of interpretation of the term 'parental involvement' among the *crèche parentales*. The extent and degree of participation is determined by each separate facility. What was encouraging was to see fathers also involved, although it is clear that, in the main, the responsibility for child care largely remains with the mother.

Many crèches appear to suffer from under-funding, and some have even had to close because of financial difficulties. One of the difficulties is that, because they cater for only very young children, usually under three, they tend to be short-term facilities for families, and therefore have problems securing long term permanent income.

To ensure that the movement is not undermined by such problems, there is a clear need not only to obtain a greater contribution from public funds for such facilities, but also a move towards more flexible working hours, which would enable more families to contribute to their operation. A greater sharing between men and women of the responsibilities of child care, and greater support and encouragement of staff working in the crèches, as well as promoting the benefits of such facilities, also appear to be vital.

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Studies and Evaluation Papers is a series of background documents drawn from field experience to present relevant findings and reflections on 'work in progress'. The series therefore acts primarily as a forum for the exchange of ideas.

As such, the findings, interpretations, conclusions and views expressed are exclusively those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

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Contributions to this series are welcomed. Suggestions should in the first instance be addressed to: Nico van Oudenhoven, Deputy Executive Director, Bernard van Leer Foundation, at the address given below.

About the Foundation

The **Bernard van Leer Foundation** is an international, philanthropic and professional institution based in The Netherlands. Created in 1949 for broad humanitarian purposes, the Foundation concentrates its resources on support for the development of community-led and culturally appropriate initiatives that focus on the developmental needs of children from birth to eight years of age. Currently, the Foundation supports some 100 major projects in more than 40 developing and industrialised countries.

As part of its mandate, the Foundation also supports evaluation, training and the dissemination of project experiences to an international audience. It communicates the outcomes of these activities to international agencies, institutions and governments, with the aim of improving practice and influencing policies to benefit children.

The Foundation's income is derived from the Van Leer Group of Companies – established by Bernard van Leer in 1919 – a worldwide industrial enterprise of which the Foundation is the principal beneficiary. In accordance with its Statutes, the Foundation gives preference in its project support to activities in countries which have an industrial involvement with the manufacturing companies.

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